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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by International Educational Development, Inc., a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[8 March 1997]

GE.97-10992 (E)

1. International Educational Development/Humanitarian Law Project welcomes the progress made on the issue of toxics and the innovative and necessary work of the Commission's Special Rapporteur, Fatma Zohra Ksentini. We have submitted information to the Special Rapporteur on the use of weapons containing depleted uranium (DU) by the United States forces in the Gulf war. We are also continuing to compile information on this subject in light of resolution 1996/16 of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in which the Sub-Commission requested that information on the use of weapons of mass destruction, including those containing depleted uranium, be included in a report of the Secretary-General to the Sub-Commission at its forty-ninth session.

2. During the Gulf war up to 800 tons of munitions containing depleted uranium were used by United States forces in military actions in Kuwait and Iraq. 1/ This was the first field test of these weapons in actual combat, and they proved to be exceptionally effective anti-tank projectiles due to their superior armour-piercing capability. It is unclear how much of the discarded shell casings and other radioactive material still remains in Iraq, but several investigators who have travelled to the area report that shell casings containing depleted uranium are scattered all over the ground in many areas, including in school yards and other similar civilian locales. 2/

3. Depleted uranium contains about 30 per cent less than normal of U^{235}, a dangerous radioisotope of uranium used in nuclear bombs and commercial power plants. It is a byproduct of extraction of U^{235}-form natural uranium. Much of depleted uranium is U^{238} with a half-life of 4 billion years.

4. Depleted uranium vaporizes when deployed in armour-piercing bullets. 3/ Scientific studies indicate if as much as one small particle (<5 microns in diameter) enters the lungs, the lungs and surrounding tissue will be exposed to 270 times the radiation permitted for workers in the radiation industry. 4/

5. We first raised this issue at the fifty-second session of the Commission when, in conjunction with Margarita Papandreou and Women for Mutual Security and the International Commission of Inquiry on Economic Sanctions, we addressed the serious situation of, in particular, children in Iraq. Thousands of children in Iraq suffer from illnesses related to depleted uranium compounded by the effects of the economic sanctions. Now, children and animals in the area are being born with the serious congenital anomalies and disabilities associated with low-grade radiation poisoning. At that session we presented Dr. Horst Gunther who has travelled to Iraq and who has documented, in report and by photograph, the devastating situation in Iraq.

6. Since that time, more evidence of the use of depleted uranium and the Iraqi medical catastrophe has been presented, while at the same time the controversy over "Gulf War Syndrome" escalates in the United States. It now appears that key information relating to this situation has been removed from top secret files or destroyed.

7. Evidence compiled in the United States indicates as many as 50,000 veterans of the United States forces in the Gulf war and 4,000 or more from the allied countries have conditions that appear to be clear consequences

of military service. 5/ There are no available statistics on the number of Iraqis showing similar symptoms, although Dr. Gunther's investigations indicate many thousands.

8. In addition to the serious problems faced by those exposed to DU during the Gulf war, there is a worldwide problem of the disposal of DU. There are an estimated 1 billion pounds of DU tailings in the United States, and the United States Department of Energy is seeking opportunities to dispose of it. 6/ There are an estimated 30 million kg of DU tailings stored in Europe. 7/ The United States Army Environmental Policy Institute (USAEPI) reports that the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Thailand, Israel, France and other unspecified countries have developed or are developing DU weapons. 8/

9. We urge the Special Rapporteur to investigate the situation of the use of DU in the Gulf war and its effect on human rights. We also urge the Special Rapporteur to monitor the situation of DU storage and transport.

Notes

1/ Van der Keur, H., "Uranium weapons pass the battlefield test" (De Groene Amsterdammer, June 1994) (tr. K. Houck). Some researchers estimate 300 tons. See, e.g. Arkin, W., "The desert glows - with propaganda", The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, vol. 12 (May 1993), indicating that the United States forces fired 300 tons.

2/ Dr. Horst Gunther, a German medical doctor, has photographic evidence of shell casings in civilian areas.

3/ D.P. Skogman, "Depleted uranium facts", Commander, United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, Department of the Army, Fact Sheet, 24 May 1991.

4/ G. Nicolson et al., "Progress on Persian Gulf war illnesses - reality and hypothesis", International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology, vol. 4, No. 3 (1995) at 365, 368.

5/ Ibid.

6/ See, e.g. United States Department of Energy, "Potential availability of normal and depleted uranium", DP-273, Surplus Property Sales, 8 March 1994.

7/ Lippard and Davis, "Depleted uranium hexaflouride management study", Louisiana Energy Service (1991).

8/ USAEPI, "Health and environmental consequences of depleted uranium use by the U.S. Army: summary of report to Congress" (1994).